

Priory Park School

Managing behaviour as positive communication



Priory School

Priory school is a community special school run by Croydon council for students with severe and/ or profound learning difficulties and autism. Students usually come to Priory in Year 7 and can stay at the Tennison Road site until the age of 16. There is then a transfer to our post 16 centre at hermitage road, where students stay until the age of 19 (Year 14). We work closely with families, post 19 services, Social Services and the Health Authority to place pupils in the most appropriate provision. Students leaving Priory Post 16 Centre transition to either: residential placements, most of which are residential specialist colleges, colleges of further education or day Care Centres.

Working effectively with learners whose behaviours can challenge

Communication may be reflexive or responsive to the environment rather than purposeful. Some students at Priory communicate in ways other than formal language and have individual repertoires of vocalisations, gestures, body movements, eye contact, eye pointing and facial expressions. All students are enabled to communicate in their preferred way. Some students have behaviours that challenge. Such behaviour is viewed as a student's attempt to communicate. This case study is about how staff at Priory identify and analyse the challenging behaviour presented by some students and transform it into effective communication.

The case study should be read in conjunction with four other documents, included as appendices

1. An exemplar tracking sheet
2. An exemplar functional analysis
3. An exemplar risk assessment
4. Active and reactive strategies

The initial basis of the work around challenging behaviour is to establish the reasons behind what the student is trying to communicate through their challenging behaviour and then to replace these behaviours with other, potentially less harmful means of communication. The best way to illustrate this approach is to consider it through the experiences of an individual student, Sam.

Sam had been at the school since 2006 when he entered Year 7. He was placed in a mixed ability group which he found very difficult. He demonstrated challenging behaviour from the beginning of his time at Priory which was managed with functional analysis (appendix 1) and behaviour programmes (appendix 2).

Sam completed a term of one day transition days to the Post 16 Centre where it was immediately identified that in order to support Sam to communicate more effectively his challenging behaviours would need to be observed and analysed. The behaviours included hitting, kicking, grabbing, scratching and biting people. He would also throw objects, tip tables over and try to head butt people.

Initially a passport was created for Sam which set out his communication style (the fact that he is non verbal), he has no sight in his right eye, he has learning difficulties and general developmental delay associated with his diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy. All of these physical impairments impacted on him and appeared to result in significant frustration which manifested itself in challenging behaviour.

At the beginning of the year Class 7 staff:

- Completed a tracking sheet (appendix 1) to record when Sam presented these behaviours and they investigated what he was trying to communicate at the time
- Completed a functional analysis form (appendix 2.) which described his behaviours, highlighted what the behaviours were communicating, evaluated his strengths and looked at characteristics that would help staff to work out strategies to support Sam
- Completion of a risk assessment profile. (appendix 3)
- Created a positive behaviour programme (appendix 4) which clearly describes active responses to prevent incidences, reactive responses to handle challenging situations, communication styles which best suit Sam, guidance on interaction with him and calming techniques.

The areas identified above were accessed and used by all staff to ensure a uniform approach to working with Sam.

Sam's behaviour programme is a working document, therefore if he develops different behaviours they can be added to the programme immediately and a consistent approach to dealing with it is developed, agreed and implemented.

Sam's Positive Behaviour programme was updated in December 2011ⁱ. This was the second update of his programme. The update happened because there was an incident where Sam bit another student's hand as the student was going to shake his hand to say good morning. The active response highlighted the potential for him to do it again and it also informed staff not to put students at risk in this way again.

Since this amendment to the behaviour programme Sam has not bitten another student. Keeping the behaviour programme a live document that can be updated and amended as situations happen ensures there is little room for negative behaviours to become embedded in the students behaviour patterns.

ⁱ See section highlighted in orange